



### **The Library Service**

A new partnership brokered with Barclays Bank means customers continue to have access to banking services at libraries in Weston Favell, Daventry and Towcester where physical banks have closed. This enables residents to access advice and support around banking issues locally and is bringing in an additional £25k income for the service in space hire.

Partnership working with the Adult Learning service has led to investment in library spaces to create learner friendly spaces for our customers. Public Health and Adult Learning have used some of their funding to refurbish dedicated areas and install smart screens for teaching at Weston Favell Library, Brackley Library and East Hunsbury Library. The learner friendly spaces are ideal for libraries and the Business and IP Centre to deliver workshops and training sessions as well as for Adult Learning Colleagues to deliver courses significantly enhancing the learning offer from these libraries.

### **Queens Baton Relay**

WNC's Sport & Active Lives team are working with representatives of Birmingham 2022 to propose location and route in West Northants for the Queens Baton Relay. The event will form part of the nationwide baton relay ahead of the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham late this year.

### **Improving energy efficiency: Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund**

West Northamptonshire Council and NPH have been successful and received over £6million from the government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF), to upgrade 429 council-owned homes in Northampton. For the successful local authorities who submitted a bid as part of the Wave 1 SHDF, £179 million has been offered to 69 projects.

The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) is financed by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and aims to assist with the costs of energy efficiency upgrades to social housing stock. The Fund aims to improve EPC ratings to a minimum of EPC C, thereby reducing emissions and bills, and helping to tackle fuel poverty. Wave 1 aims to build on the success of the demonstrator project, which NPH are currently delivering that will see the upgrade of 150 homes which will make them more energy efficient and an improved carbon footprint.

The project will be delivered by NPH and will result in improvements to some of the least energy efficient homes they manage, and will include external wall insulation, improved ventilation, new windows and door and some homes will also receive loft installation, these works will result in homes being easier to heat and energy bills reduced.

## **Homelessness & Housing Solutions**

The Street Services Team have successfully delivered Housing-led solutions and rapid rehousing pathways to meet the needs of 40 rough sleepers, to help prevent them from returning to the streets. This included the provision of an on-site Adult Social worker which significantly helped rough sleepers with complex issues including mental health and institutional care.

Duty to Refer training has now been delivered to all of our Library Managers and Northamptonshire Carers.

The new, co-produced Care Leavers Protocol was presented to SLT and well received however a suggested change was requested by the Executive Director of Adults, Communities and Wellbeing. This was well received however we are currently waiting for confirmation from colleagues in the North that they are happy with the suggestion. Hopes are for this to be heard again at SLT on 8 April 2022. The new Care Leavers Transitions Panel will commence on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2022 and will take place on the first Thursday of every month thereafter. Discussions have begun with NCT regarding commissioning of suitable supported accommodation for this vulnerable cohort. The new, co-produced 16/17 year old Protocol is in its final stages of drafting. DLUHC are due to visit on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2022. This is the annual visit by the HAST team to review the housing service and provide their recommendations.

## **Museums – Reporting Period October – December 2021**

The visitor figures for Northampton Museum & Art Gallery are strong, with visitors running at 80% of pre-Covid projections and Abington Park Museum at 57% of pre-Covid projections. This compares well to the wider sector which is still operating at between 50-60% of 2019 visitor numbers.

The events programme over this period has shown increased attendance, with the notable Northamptonians and Art History Lecture series beginning to return to full attendance levels. The newly themed ‘Wellness Series’, a programme developed to support looking after our mental health began with the first Immersive Yoga sessions, using the 270 degree projection facility of the Central Hall, creating an immersive audio visual experience, which has been very well received by participants.

This period saw the opening of the ever popular Town and County Annual exhibition, returning to the main museum after a 5 year hiatus. The museum hosted the debut screening of the 60 Miles by Road or Rail project, a project capturing the people and lives of the New Town estates in Northampton’s Easter District.

Shoe Curator Rebecca Shawcross appeared as a guest on the Lauren Laverne show on BBC Radio 6 Music in November to discuss all things shoes and gave a virtual donation of the elephant boot to their digital collection.

## **The Cultural Compact.**

The Council has been awarded funding to develop a cultural strategy for Northampton, which will also have significant benefits to the wider area. The funding has allowed us to recruit a director to lead this programme which will bring together the Cultural sector within Northampton alongside the partners and stakeholders in developing a way

forward. The strategy will ensure a more joined up, cohesive sector; the promotion of our many businesses and also lead to an enhanced offer and programme for our residents. As a Council, we are committed to working with the cultural sector in understanding how they can help us with many of the challenges faced by our communities. It will form an essential part of our regeneration plans, will assist in increasing footfall into our town centres as well as helping some of our more disadvantaged communities find a voice, build pride and confidence as already demonstrated through piloted social prescribing opportunities.

### **Archives and Heritage Service**

The six months to the end of March have been busy ones for the service. Short-term lack of staffing is still causing issues but agreement on a new staffing structure, as part of the new Assets & Environment team structure, offers a real opportunity to begin to develop the service. This will focus on meeting targets set out in the service plan approved by the Joint Committee, such as regaining The National Archives accreditation.

Numbers of researchers visiting the service have been maintained with Covid precautions. The systems implemented because of the pandemic seem to be liked by most visitors. Therefore, many of the practices will be retained (for example, encouraging booking of spaces in the research rooms in advance).

In December, a project week involving all staff achieved work that could not be easily undertaken while the service is open to the public. This included packaging and listing to make Quarter Sessions records more easily accessible to the public; these are a core set of records dating back to the 17th century. Work also started on a wider project to review some collections that were not appraised as to their long-term historical importance when they were first received into the service in the period before 2000. The papers need to be reviewed to ensure they accord with the service's Acquisitions and Collections Policy and to ensure the correct material, reflecting the full range of the county's past, is retained for permanent preservation.

A survey of users and their opinions of the service was run across February and March. A total of 60 researchers replied. The most pleasing result was that in all categories, taking satisfied and very satisfied together, there was a 100% satisfied response; that is, the service had no dissatisfied customers. 100% of researchers said they were very satisfied with the helpfulness and friendliness of staff, 97% felt very satisfied they had been treated fairly and sensitively by staff, and 95% were very satisfied that staff had understood their needs.

**Councillor Adam Brown**  
**Deputy Leader of the Council**  
**Portfolio Holder for Housing, Culture & Leisure**